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April is Youth Preparedness Month

IEMA, OSFM highlight ways to involve youth in disaster preparedness

SPRINGFIELD -- Emergencies and disasters can happen at any time and anywhere. Disaster planning, response and recovery efforts should always take into account the unique needs of children, who make up roughly a quarter of the United States population. That is why this month, the Illinois Emergency Management Agency (IEMA) and the Office of the State Fire Marshal Office (OSFM) are taking steps to promote youth preparedness.

“Each year, millions of children are impacted by disasters,” **said IEMA Director Alicia Tate-Nadeau.** “Studies have shown, children are positive influencers in their households. Children can effectively bring the message of preparedness home to their families. Participating in youth preparedness programs empowers children to become leaders at home and in their schools and communities.”

“Kids practice fire drills each year at school, and families should practice these drills at home too,” **said Matt Perez, Illinois State Fire Marshal.** “The Office of the State Fire Marshall encourages families to practice their home fire escape plan twice a year. Every home needs working smoke alarms and a well-thought-out fire escape plan. Make sure all members of your family can identify two ways out of each room and a family meeting spot outside the home.”

Tips for incorporating children into disaster preparedness:

[Sparky the Fire Dog](#) is mascot of The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA). Sparky is used to help educate kids and parents on fire prevention and safety. The NFPA has established a Sparky [website](#) and [Facebook page](#) that offers a wealth of age-appropriate games, videos, apps and other activities that make learning about fire safety easy and fun.

Another great resource comes from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). FEMA and the American Red Cross offer a disaster preparedness activity book, *[Prepare with Pedro](#)*. This booklet is designed to encourage youth and their families to be better prepared for disasters by offering safety advice alongside crosswords, coloring pages, matching games and more.

FEMA also offers a [Youth Preparedness Council](#) as an opportunity for teenagers and young adults to serve on a national council. During their two-year term, the youth leaders complete both a local and national-level project to share ideas regarding youth disaster preparedness.

Children who are prepared experience less anxiety and feel more confident during actual emergencies and disasters. Use Youth Preparedness Month as an opportunity to promote interactive activities within your family. One way to do this is by involving children in the development of a [family emergency plan](#).

Use real world events to teach about emergency situations and disasters. Using media coverage of current disasters (Floods, tornadoes, hurricanes, power outages), talk to children about how your family would respond if this happened to you. Utilizing your family emergency plan, discuss where would you go, what would you do and how you will ensure their safety during an emergency.

For more information about disaster preparedness, visit [Ready.Illinois.gov](#).

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